

An Analysis of English Usage and Confidence
in Speaking English of Japanese University Students
Attending a Short Study Abroad Course
in the U.K. in Monolingual and Multilingual Classroom Settings

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Introduction

The confidence of Japanese University students in speaking English can be affected by the nationality of other students. In an effort to identify possible reasons for this, this study assessed the performance of students in monolingual and multilingual groups attending the University of Newcastle Summer School, UK in August 2012. After completing a questionnaire based on their feelings about speaking English, the students were then observed in identical sized groups over a four-week period. A summary based on the findings was made in order to assist those wanting to understand and improve Japanese students' spoken English skills.

Research Study

University of Newcastle Summer School - The Subjects

The 27 learners who completed the questionnaire were aged from 20 to 23, eight of whom were observed in group

discussions. They came from three different universities in Japan, majoring in a variety of subjects, but all being required to take a General English or Specific English module, the latter based on their degree subject. Japanese students made up about 25% of the attendees, the other main groups of participants on the programme were from China, Saudi Arabia and Germany.

The questionnaire for assessing student confidence and usage in speaking English *(produced in English and Japanese to assist low level students)*

We would like to ask you to do two questionnaires, one now and the other two weeks later. It is not a test, so there is no right or wrong answer. Please answer honestly and freely, as this will greatly assist in our research. Anonymity is firmly assured, the student number will be used only to compare answers to similar questions in both questionnaires. Thank you very much in advance for your kind cooperation.

これから2種類のアンケートに答えてください。1つ目は今ここで行いますが、2つ目は2週間後に行います。学生番号を記入する欄がありますが、すべて研究用の番号です。すべて匿名で行いますので心配しないでください。これから配布する質問用紙には、8つの質問（あなたが英語を話すとき及び日本語を話すときの内容）があります。分かる範囲内で答えてください。よろしくお願いします。

Results for Part One – Studying in Japan

SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, N = Neither Agree nor Disagree, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree.

No.	Question	SA	A	N	D	SD
1	I worry about making mistakes in my English class	14	8	5	0	0
2	I worry when I know I'm going to be asked to speak in the English class	16	8	1	1	1
3	I keep thinking that the other students in my class are better in English than I am	7	5	10	3	2
4	In English classes, I can get so nervous that I forget things I know	6	13	3	4	1
5	It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my English class	6	8	9	4	0
6	I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make	7	8	7	3	2
7	I don't feel comfortable speaking English to people from other countries	15	9	0	3	0
8	FINAL QUESTION - I worry when I have to make a speech in Japanese in front of groups of people (<i>If SA or A, state one reason why</i>)	4	12	6	3	2

Part One –日本での英語の勉強時について

SA=とてもそう思う A=そう思う N=まあまあ D=そうは思わない

SD=ぜったいに思わない

No	質問	SA	A	N	D	SD
1	英語の授業で間違えることを心配する	14	8	5	0	0
2	英語の授業で答えさせられることを心配する	16	8	1	1	1
3	英語の授業で自分が一番英語ができないと思う	7	5	10	3	2
4	英語の授業ですでに知っていることを忘れてしまうのではないかと心配する	6	13	3	4	1
5	英語の授業で自主的に発言するのは嫌いだ	6	8	9	4	0
6	私の間違いを先生がいちいち訂正するのは好きではない	7	8	7	3	2
7	自分が英語を話すとき他の生徒に笑われるのが不安だ	15	9	0	3	0
8	日本語でも人前で発言したり、発表したりするのは好きではない (SA か A)	4	12	6	3	2

Results for Part Two - Studying in the UK (Completed two weeks later).

SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, N = Neither Agree nor Disagree, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree.

No.	Question	SA	A	N	D	SD
1	I worry about making mistakes in my English class	9	5	5	7	1
2	I worry when I know I'm going to be called on in English class	9	8	6	1	3
3	I keep thinking that the other students in my class are better in English than I am	19	5	0	3	0
4	It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my English class	5	9	9	3	1
5	I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make	2	7	3	11	4
6	I don't feel comfortable speaking English to people from other countries	8	7	7	5	0
	FINAL QUESTION. Choose only one of the following...					

7a	I would be more confident speaking English in a class with more Japanese students	0	0	2	1	6
7b	I would be more confident speaking English in a class with less Japanese students	12	3	1	1	1

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No.	質問	SA	A	N	D	SD
1	英語の授業で間違えることを心配する	9	5	5	7	1
2	英語の授業で答えさせられることを心配する	9	8	6	1	3
3	英語の授業で自分が一番英語ができないと思う	19	5	0	3	0
4	英語の授業で知っていることを忘れてしまうのではないかと心配する	5	9	9	3	1
5	私の間違いを先生がいちいち訂正するのは好きではない	2	7	3	11	4
6	自分が英語を話すとき他の生徒に笑われるのが不安だ	8	7	7	5	0
7a	日本人生徒がクラスに多いほうが、より自信を持って英語を話せる	0	0	2	1	6
7b	日本人生徒がクラスに少ないほうが、より自信を持って英語を話せる	12	3	1	1	1

ご協力ありがとうございました。

Main Findings From the Questionnaires

Question 1 Answers - Twenty two students agreed to some extent with the statement concerning being worried about making errors when speaking English in Japan. By the time of the second survey, eight expressed disagreement.

Question 2 Answers - Only three students didn't worry about the anticipation of being asked to speak in English while studying in Japan. The increase in random questioning in English lessons at Newcastle University, coupled with possible lower expectations held by students about the accuracy of responses expected by teachers, led to seven fewer students strongly agreeing with the statement in the second questionnaire.

Question 3 Answers - Increases in anxiety were demonstrated most strongly in their responses to question number 3, with twelve more students strongly agreeing with this statement in the second questionnaire.

Question 4 Answers - The main differentiation in the two results was in the 'neither agree nor disagree' section. The regularity of English classes in the UK compared to Japan, the new environment at the British university with the need to communicate with students from around the world could all be contributing factors in explaining why

fewer students strongly agreed and agreed with this statement in the second survey.

Question 5 Answers - Responses relating to feelings of embarrassment when volunteering answers, showed encouragingly that even after having been in the UK for a short period of time, feelings of trepidation for many diminished, as the disagree and strongly disagree responses moved from 4 to 15.

Question 6 Answers - Regardless of location, their answers concerning the correcting of mistakes indicated that feelings of anxiety remained about the same.

Question 7 Answers - Twenty four out of twenty seven students either strongly agreed or agreed with not feeling comfortable about speaking English with non-Japanese in Japan. This number fell to sixteen by the time of the second questionnaire, which may be an indication that, even after only two weeks of regular association with students from other countries in British classrooms and with constant usage of English in a native environment, some students' fears about using English were reduced.

Question 8 Answers for Questionnaire 1 - Sixteen students expressed concerns, to a greater or lesser extent, about having to make speeches in their native language

in question 8. Reasons expressed for such apprehension included having too quiet a voice, uncertainty about the subject matter, inexperience in speaking before an audience, not knowing where to look, and poor body language. For some students, such feelings stayed at the same level regardless of the language they were using, whilst for others they may have been exacerbated when having to use English.

Question 7a or 7b Answers for

Questionnaire 2 (In the UK – depending on which question answered) -The results for 7a show that none of the Japanese students questioned agreed that more

compatriots in the classroom would increase their confidence in speaking English. Responses to 7b for students in all-Japanese groups indicated the same thing; fifteen out of eighteen students stated that they would feel more comfortable using English if they were in a class with fewer Japanese students. One reason for this may be the fact that having fewer people sharing a native language would force Japanese students to talk in English. It could also be due to students sharing classes in the UK with the same students from lessons in Japan and this having a detrimental effect on their levels of confidence.

Results from the Classroom Observations

Monolingual Group Observations - *Italics* = 1st Observation, **Bold** = 2nd Observation

Observation Question & Student Number	No1	No2	No3	No4	No5	No6
(Number of times) Starting a conversation	<i>1 / 2</i>	<i>0 / 1</i>	<i>0 / 0</i>	<i>4 / 5</i>	<i>1 / 1</i>	<i>1 / 4</i>
Asking a question	<i>1 / 1</i>	<i>0 / 0</i>	<i>3 / 1</i>	<i>1 / 0</i>	<i>0 / 0</i>	<i>1 / 5</i>
Answering an open question (one not directed at anyone)	<i>2 / 2</i>	<i>0 / 0</i>	<i>3 / 3</i>	<i>0 / 1</i>	<i>1 / 1</i>	<i>3 / 5</i>
Changes a subject/focus	<i>0 / 0</i>	<i>0 / 0</i>	<i>0 / 0</i>	<i>4 / 3</i>	<i>0 / 0</i>	<i>0 / 2</i>
Confirm another's opinion (+ some words used if applicable, to be filled	<i>0 / 1</i>	<i>1 / 0</i>	<i>0 / 0</i>	<i>2 / 3</i>	<i>2 / 1</i>	<i>1 / 7</i>

in below)						
Maximum length of continuous talking during discussion (in seconds)	2/ 5	5/ 5	5/ 10	10/ 20	5/ 5	5/ 30

Starting a Conversation - The most significant change was with student number six, who started four periods of dialogue in the second observation compared to only one in the first.

Asking a Question - Student number six was the only participant to ask more questions the second time around.

Answering an Open Question - Both student three and six volunteered the same number of answers in the first observation, but again, six contributed the most two weeks later.

Changes a Subject - Student number four introduced more new topics than the other five people combined. Students one, two and three did not manage a single change between them on either occasion.

Confirming the opinion of Others - Student six showed a dramatic increase in the number of confirmation utterances in the observations.

Maximum Length of Continuous Talk - Students three, four and six all at least doubled their speaking times from their first to their second observations.

Multilingual Group Observation

(Nationalities of other students in group: 2 Germans, 1 Saudi Arabian and 1 Chinese)

Observation Question	Student A	Student B
(Number of times) Starting a conversation	0/ 2	0/ 0
Asking a question	0/ 3	0/ 1
Answering an open question (one not directed at anyone)	0/ 1	0/ 0
Changes a subject/focus	0/ 0	0/ 0

Confirm another's opinion (+ some words used if applicable, to be filled in below)	0 / 4	1 / 1
Maximum length of continuous talking during discussion (in seconds)	5 / 20	5 / 5

Starting a Conversation - Neither student began a conversation in the first observation and student B repeated this reluctance in the observation two weeks later.

Asking a Question - Student A managed to do this on three occasions in the second observation.

Answering an Open Question - Only once did either student volunteer an answer; Student A in the second observation.

Changes a Subject - Not once was this done by either student.

Confirming the opinion of Others - Student A did this on four occasions in the second observation; never in the first.

Maximum Length of Continuous Talk - Student A dramatically increased the time she talked continuously from 5 seconds in the first observation to 20 seconds in the second.

Conclusion

In 1987, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Science, Sports and

Technology began providing opportunities for improving the English-speaking capabilities of students in Japan, and this governmental decision was followed with the introduction of a number of university programmes offering the chance for Japanese students to study and speak English abroad. Such decisions were made so that, by exposing Japanese students to international cultures, increasing their contact time with native English teachers and citizens, as well as with English learners from other countries, their spoken English would see a significant improvement.

These findings go some way to confirming this theory. The majority feedback from the quantitative and qualitative research shows that, in order to improve the amount of English spoken, Japanese students need to act in a more individual manner.

Explanations for increased confidence, regardless of being placed in a monolingual or multilingual class at the University of Newcastle, related to an individual's characteristics. Those students observed revealed on numerous occasions that their confidence in using

English was not dependent on the nationality of other class members, and, on those rare occasions when it was affected, (for example, using discourse markers similar to those of German students speaking English), utilised noticed language in a positive sense.

Limitations

This study was based on results from one very small set of subjects at one particular time. Participants in the study were from a fairly homogeneous group, both in terms of age and social class. Other results may well have been gleaned from more mixed groups of students.

Furthermore, with the total number of Japanese students on the course being twenty seven then, as mentioned earlier in this research, the prior knowledge of others' English language skills may have been unavoidable, therefore possibly influencing classroom performance in a way that might have been eradicated if there was a larger selection from which to choose the observed students.

Further Research Possibilities

Japan - Future evaluations of the impact of study abroad programmes and the effects of the nationality of classmates, should be undertaken, to include follow-up studies, weeks or months after the students have returned to Japan. It is taken as an absolute that some language

regression will occur after returning to Japan, but future confidence in using English in the classroom could be evaluated by discovering if the returning Japanese students felt more confident speaking English in their university classes versus other situations, (e.g. with foreigners they meet, or choosing English karaoke songs, etc.), after their return to Japan.

For a longer-term assessment of the value of study-abroad programmes, it may also be beneficial to discover the proportion of participants who, after graduation, chose to do another course or accept employment overseas, either in an English-speaking country or elsewhere, as opposed to staying in Japan, and how much their short stay course at Newcastle University influenced their decision.

The UK or in another country – This is a very limited investigation and a more in-depth investigation should be undertaken to assess the effect that the nationality of classmates has on Japanese students' confidence in speaking English, both in the U.K. and in other countries. A prolonged study may confirm or refute the findings of this piece of research, with a greater number of subjects being observed and interviewed on a greater number of occasions and over a longer period of time during their stay abroad.

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